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AUTHOR Sherman, Pamela; And Others
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AVAILABLE FROM Sigmund Tobias, Institute for Research and Development in Occupational Education, Center for the Advanced Study of Education, 33 West 42nd St., New York, NY 10036.

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ABSTRACT

Women who reenter college after years of work or family responsibilities were compared to women with similar backgrounds who do not reenter school on measures of fear of success and achievement anxiety. A questionnaire designed to determine reentry status, age, socioeconomic standing, facilitating and debilitating anxiety, and fear of success was administered. Subjects were randomly assigned to either the "Anne" or "John" cue from Matina Horner's original 1968 study of fear of success, based in part on negative imagery expressed in the cue-elicited stories reflecting concern about success. The Alpert-Haber Achievement Anxiety test was used to measure achievement anxiety. Responses were analyzed for 94 women, ranging in age from 19 to 61 years, who were either being counseled for school or job reentry, taking undergraduate classes at a City University of New York campus, or participating in women's clubs in Manhattan. Findings indicate that there are no differences in fear of success between women who reenter school after working or raising a family and those who do not. Women in both groups tended to write more fear of success stories to the "Anne" cue, but not to a statistically significant degree. Descriptions of the fear of success construct appear to have a good deal in common with both achievement motivation and anxiety in achievement situations that, in the past, have had high relationships with the achievement anxiety scales. The highest multiple correlation between fear of success and facilitating and debilitating anxiety was obtained when "Anne" was used as the cue to measure fear of success. A bibliography is appended. (SW)

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Pamela Sherman; Sigmund Tobias[2]
City College, CUNY

Mara Zibrin;
Graduate Center, CUNY

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Pamela Sherman; Siqmund Tobias
City College, CUNY

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The purpose of the study was to investigate whether women who reenter college after years of work or family responsibilities experience less Fear of Success (FOS) than comparable women who do not reenter school. The literature concerning reentry women covered demographic data, educational needs and performance, and psychological characteristics. For instance, the majority of women 23 years and older were described as needing to acquire psychological postures of goal orientation, independence and objectivity after their arrival on campus (Steel, 1974; Eckard, 1977). These adults also preferred information to counseling or guidance or training (Arbeiber, 1976). The educational goals of reentry women were to obtain a degree, to increase job potential, and self satisfaction (Willis, 1977). Some studies suggested that symbolic identification with others and administrative support may be the keys to promoting student growth for reentry women (Hedstrom, 1977; May, 1977; Plotsky and Ohm, 1976).

Studies also found that mature women graduate students had a higher achievement motive than younger graduate students or undergraduates (Lubetkin and Lubetkin, 1968). Reentry women tended to work harder than their younger counterparts, and on the average, got higher grades. Their performance was attributed to more highly focused motivations and wider reading interests (Marchese, 1975). One study found that women who linked a career with personal ful-

fillment were more likely to aspire to careers in non-traditional fields, were supportive of the women's movement and rated themselves higher in intellectual self-confidence (Astin, 1976).

To demonstrate the existence of Fear of Success (FOS), Matina Horner used a projective test in which females wrote a story about a verbally described unambiguous success experience by a female. The cue used was "After first term finals, Anne finds herself at the top of her medical school class " (For the men, "John" was substituted in the story).

In the literature on FOS, some studies indicated (when the cues employed in Horner's original investigation were used) that women did score higher in FOS Imagery than did men. Women high in the motive to avoid success did better on tests taken alone than in competition, and low scoring women behaved more like men in that they did better in competition (Horner, 1968; Alper, 1974).

Later studies produced very conflicting data. Lower FOS was found in some studies for women while men's FOS increased. Explanations of their findings dealt with differences in populations between different schools (some being more highly selective than others) which resulted in subjects being less competitive and achievement oriented than more selective schools. Higher FOS for men may also have been the result of social changes involving re-definition of sex roles (Feather and Simon, 1973).

Other studies indicated that FOS grew in intensity from the fifth through the twelfth grade and that the cues used affected subjects differently at different age levels. No sex differences were found in the expression of FOS imagery if the cues used to measure FOS were appropriate to peer group norms (Tresemer, 1974).

One study using cues that were masculine competitive, masculine noncompetitive, feminine competitive, feminine noncompetitive, and nonspecific elicited significantly greater FOS for younger subjects than for older ones with feminine cues. Also found was that nonspecific and noncompetitive cues elicited more FOS than specific or competitive cues for all ages (King, 1977).

In spite of the inconsistencies present in the scoring, methodology, populations, and interpretation of the literature on FOS, several trends emerged that seemed to be fairly consistent. One of those was that older women, by and large, experience less FOS than women in their teens and early twenties. Another trend seemed to be that when the original "Anne" cue was used, there was greater FOS produced no matter which females were being tested (Sorrentino and Short, 1974; Olsen and Willemsen, 1978; Collis, 1977). The exception to this was the replication of the original Horner (1968) study which found that once the women who had high FOS previously had taken care of their affiliative needs, FOS decreased significantly. However, it was found that women who had high FOS tended to get pregnant more often than those who had scored low in FOS when on the verge of success. Such success would have put them in conflict with home and husband (Hoffman, 1977).

Other research has shown that women with traditional identifications experience more FOS than less traditionally oriented females. The pressures felt by "traditional" women causes them greater anxiety when presented with a situation in which a woman achieves in a "man's world" thereby threatening their need to cling to the traditional role. Women who are reentering school after raising a family or finding themselves in unfulfilling jobs, are defining themselves more

in terms of "re-defined sex roles." The very fact that they have taken the step to go back to college supports the notion that re-entry women have less anxiety about succeeding in school.

The hypothesis of this study was that reentry women experience less FOS than non-reentry women. The relationship between FOS and achievement anxiety was also explored in this study.

Method

A questionnaire was constructed to determine reentry status, age, socioeconomic standing, facilitating and debilitating anxiety and FOS. Socioeconomic status was determined by the profession of the woman and her husband or father, whichever was the head of her household. These data were quantified by means of the Hamburger Revised Occupational Scale for Rating Socioeconomic Class.

Subjects were randomly assigned to either the "Anne" or "John" cue from Matina Horner's original 1968 study of FOS. Scoring for FOS used the original criteria developed by Horner, which included any negative imagery expressed in the cue-elicited stories reflecting concern about the success. A consistency check produced 80% agreement among judges. The Alpert-Haber Achievement Anxiety Test was used to measure achievement anxiety.

Subjects

In the reentry group, subjects were selected from a university affiliated organization which offers classes in counseling to help women return to school or to the job market, and subjects from undergraduate psychology classes at one of the CUNY universities. Subjects for the non-reentry group were selected from women's clubs associated with various synagogues and churched located on the west side of Manhattan.

Of the 125 questionnaires administered 94 were completed. Subjects ranged in age from 19 to 61 years. The reentry group was an average of six years younger, and of slightly lower socio-economic status than the non-reentry group.

Results

A 2 (reentry/non-reentry) X 2 (John/Anne cue) analysis of variance indicated that there were no significant main effects or interactions. The reentry women as a group exhibited slightly less FOS in their reaction to both Anne and John protocols than non-reentry women. Both groups exhibited more FOS when Anne was the subject of the story, but the difference in FOS scores between the Anne and John stories was less for the reentry women than for the non-reentry group. None of these differences was statistically significant.

When the correlations between FOS and other variables were examined, the highest values were found for the facilitating (.33) and debilitating anxiety (-.30) subscales with a multiple correlation of .37 for the total Achievement Anxiety Scale as a whole, for the total sample with FOS. For only those subjects (N=46) who were presented with the Anne story, the correlation between FOS and facilitating anxiety was .43 and -.30 with debilitating anxiety, with a multiple correlation of .46. The subjects (N=48) who responded to the John story showed a much lower correlation between FOS and the two types of anxiety, having values of .22 and -.16 respectively, and a multiple correlation of .23.

Discussion

It would appear from the results of this study that there are no FOS differences between those women who choose to reenter school

after working or raising a family and those who do not. Women in both groups tended to write more Fear of Success stories to the "Anne" cue, but not to a statistically significant degree.

Of some interest were the finding of relationships between FOS and the achievement anxiety scales. Descriptions of the FOS construct appear to have a good deal in common with both achievement motivation and anxiety in achievement situations which, in the past, have had high relationships with the achievement anxiety scales.

The multiple correlation between both anxiety scales and FOS is substantial in view of the fact that there is a restriction of variance due to the dichotomus scoring of the FOS variable. If it were possible to measure FOS as a continuous variable, the correlation would have been substantially higher. This finding raises the interesting possibility that the FOS and achievement anxiety constructs might be very similiar indeed. The present findings, and those of other investigations, have shown that the FOS construct is most evident when the "Anne" cue is used. The highest multiple correlation between FOS and facilitating and debilitating anxiety was obtained when "Anne" was used as the cue to measure FOS. It would appear that further investigation is merited in the degree to which these two constructs appear to be synonymous.

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